

ARTICLE APPEARED
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CHICAGO TRIBUNE
20 NOVEMBER 1981

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Cuba's role in the Underground

THE CODE NAME was "Delgado."

And all a fugitive Weather Underground member had to do to contact a colleague also on the run was telephone the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa; the Cuban diplomats would do the rest.

If, for example, Katherine Boudin wished to contact Bernardine Dohrn, she would call the Cuban Embassy and leave a message that Katherine Delgado wanted to get in touch with Bernardine Delgado.

Then Boudin would leave a phone number or an address at which she could be reached. And the Cubans would refer to their files and relay the message, no matter where Dohrn might be hiding.

PRESUMABLY, the Cuban Embassy phone lines were inviolate to Canadian intelligence authorities because of diplomatic immunity. But even if the Royal Mounties were on the wire, the conversation would be meaningless unless they knew the code.

And that system was only one of many the Weather Underground used with the assistance of Cuban diplomatic personnel in the United States and Canada to keep in touch after the group plunged into anonymity to blunt official surveillance.

Scattering to the winds by choice to successfully evade authorities for more than a decade, the demonstrators-turned-bombers were able to use Cuban diplomatic channels as a private communications network.

And it was only after the Weather Underground's bloody armored car ambush in New York last month that reports finally surfaced about Cuban intelligence officers at Fidel Castro's United Nations mission in Manhattan using their status to maintain regular contact with the American revolutionaries.

That network, according to a retired Federal Bureau of Investigation specialist in revolutionary terrorism, was established in 1970, soon after the group went underground.

It enabled Weather Underground leaders like Boudin and Dohrn to maintain contact between revolutionary cells while remaining fugitives for 11 years.

Boudin was arrested last month in a police roadblock established after the Brink's armored car robbery. Two police officers were murdered in an exchange of gunfire at the roadblock. Dohrn surrendered last December and received three years' probation after pleading guilty to charges arising from the "Days of Rage" riots in Chicago in 1969.

THE CUBAN LINK, however, was only one in a series of contacts the revolutionaries made with Soviet surrogates from Eastern and Western Europe to Southeast Asia and Castro's Caribbean communist foothold.

Robert R. Glendon, an executive protection consultant to corporations since his 1977 FBI retirement after 26 years, says the Weather Underground members became highly dependent on foreign sources for ideological support and strategy.

In 1967, Glendon said, revolutionary leaders then using the banner of the Students for a Democratic Society traveled to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to traffic with Viet Cong representatives.

In 1968, Bernardine Dohrn led a delegation to Budapest, Hungary, then traveled to Yugoslavia, Sweden, and West Germany to parley with student activist groups. Others met the next year in Japan with violence-prone Red Army student activists, he continued.

BUT THE SINGLE most significant session of American revolutionary leaders with spokesmen for Soviet client states occurred in July, 1969, in Havana, when Dohrn and others mapped strategy for antiwar demonstrations in the U.S. with Huynh Van Ba, a Viet Cong representative.

"They met there for eight days discussing what shape the campaign against the Viet Nam War would take in the U.S.," Glendon said. "It was agreed to launch a 'Bring the War Home' drive by creating violence in American cities."

"What finally emerged were the October, 1969, Days of Rage in Chicago. And thereafter, they decided to resort to what they called armed struggle, rather than street demonstrations, to achieve what they viewed as a revolutionary situation in the United States."

"In Havana, Van Ba advised them to recruit more violence-prone members who would fight authorities in the streets."

"UNLESS YOU understand that they are true believers, you will miss their devotion to Marxism and Leninism. They are internationalists. They identify with comparable revolutionary forces elsewhere. They need their expertise to run operations."

"They need the political indoctrination to buttress their beliefs through identifying with other revolutionaries who have been successful like the Soviets, Vietnamese, and Cubans. That is why they have identified so closely with the Cubans."

"Cuba is geographically close. It is somewhere they could get to to personally witness a revolutionary experience. And, when they were younger back in the late 1960s, their popular romantic figures were Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara."

"In Cuba, they found what seemed to be an answer to what they considered the revolutionary struggle in the United States. Naturally, the Cubans were happy to accommodate them. And have been ever since."